

The Study Chant, Trope and Neumes

Of almost equal antiquity as the Shofar is the chant used when studying the Talmud, or other sacred writings, and the cantillation (trope) of the Bible.

In Megilah 32-A of the Talmud Babli, Rabbi Yochanan admonishes against "whoever reads without pleasantness and teaches oral law without song." The type of chant the orthodox use in their study is an expressive musical form of a recitative of fluctuations and crescendos — often of the sweet cantabile style or that of a dirge, depending upon the topic in discussion. The song "Mai Komashma Lon" conveys some idea of the chant, though in the case of this particular song it is of the ultra plaintive style. This "study chant" is of an oral tradition of hundreds of years which has never been consciously set down in notes as such, but which continues, generation after generation, just as the study of the Torah continues among the Jews. Some Yiddish songs are based on that recitative mode.

The cantillation of the Torah and the rest of the Bible has been notated with a type of marking which is not only unique but, doubtlessly, the oldest form of musical notation in the world of continuous use, called "neumes," vari-shaped drawings with each single mark representing a whole group of tones.

Every Saturday, the holidays and on Monday and Thursday, portions of the Torah and Prophets are read. The entire Torah is read in one year's cycle, the termination of which is celebrated with the gay holiday of Simkhat Torah — The Joy of the Torah. The reading is done with a type of chant which differs from the "study chant." This cantillation is called by the Yiddish-speaking Jews as "Tropp," from the Greek word "Trope," while the Sefardim call it "Nengina," which is the Hebrew word for melody. The trope is learned by all orthodox Jewish boys before they reach the age of thirteen, for on the Sabbath nearest his birthday, they are called upon at the synagogue to read the ascribed portion of the Bible for that Sabbath in trope. That day is the boy's confirmation (Bar Mitsvah — The son bound to observe the precepts) in which he becomes a full fledged member of the Jewish congregation and community.

The Jewish scholars attribute the reading of the Bible on Saturdays as a part of the service to the scribe Ezra, who came from Persia to Jerusalem in 458 B.C.E. to strengthen the faith of the recently returned Jews who intermarried in alarming proportions with non-Jews. To them he read the Torah.

Luke, in the New Testament, also mentions Jesus reading the Haftara. He writes: "And he (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and, as his custom was, he went up into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered upon him the book of the prophet Isaiah." (Luke IV: 16-17) This very custom is still practiced by the orthodox Jews the world over.

Visitors are also honored by being called to the "Bimah" (platform or pulpit), to read the allotted portion from the Bible.

The troupe is divided into two main sections, the "Parashaplural: Parashiyoth (or Parashot)" and the "Haftara-plural: Haftaroth." The Parasha style is used solely for the Pentateuch, while the Haftara is for the Prophets. The same neumes are used for both, but each gets a different intonation. The "Megilot," in turn, likewise uses the same neumes but the cantillation expresses the mood of the Megilah and the occasion of the holiday. Thus, the Book of Lamentations, read during Tisha Be'Av, which commemorates the destruction of both Temples, is cantillated in a very lamentable form; the Book of Esther, read on Purim, is chanted gaily, while the Song of Songs is treated with a "dolce" type of cantillation. Still other melodic moods existed for the Psalms, Job, Proverbs and holidays.

The same neumes get a further and entirely distinct treatment if sung by Ashkenazim, Sefardim or the various Oriental groups. There is a stillfurther difference even among these groups. German, Polish or Lithuanian Jews, even though all Ashkenazim, will chant the trope with differences enough for one familiar with the cantillations to be able to recognize the variations immediately. The same differences exist among the Amsterdam, Cairo, Syrian or Moroccan Jews, even though these follow the Sefardic rite. A. Z. Idelsohn, one of the foremost authorities on Jewish music, notated twenty-three variations for the same neumes, mostly from among the Oriental and Sefardic Jews and even this is not a complete listing. Of all these variations, those of the Oriental and Sefardic Jews, according to all authorities and sources, are nearest to or the exact of the original, for they show definite relationship to the melos of the indigenous nations of that part of the world. Among the Ashkenazim, the Western major notes crept in.

The early Christians, who were Jews, took this trope with them as the new Christian sect developed. From this original cantillation the Gregorian chant developed, so named after Pope Gregory the Great (540-604), who compiled and stabilized the results of the ancient Hebrew trope. A form of the Hebrew neumes was used by the Christians until the ninth century. The Te Deum, Sanctus, Sursum Corda, Psalms and many other ancient Catholic prayers are likewise related to the Hebrew cantillation. The Haftara, which means "dismissal," because in olden times it closed the service, was translated into the Latin "Missa" meaning the same. From it the name "Mass" is derived. In the Mass, when the priest turns to the congregation he chants in what seems a pure Hebrew Haftara cantillation the words "Ite, missa est." (Go, it is ended — dismissed.)

SHEENA

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Square Dance For Eight Couples

FOLKRAFT RECORD No. 1107 - B

SHEENA is one of the prettiest quadrilles. It originated in the Arkhangelsk region of Northern Russia, around the White Sea and near Finland. The dance is fast moving, intricate in pattern, but once mastered will be found to be well worth the effort.

Eight couples stand in a regular square formation with two couples on each side of the square. The numbering of couples is the same as in all square dances, the two couples with their backs to the music being "one" etc. Face partners. Keep body erect; man's free hand on hips, woman's hand holds skirt. Two steps per measure throughout the dance.

FIGURE I: A grand-right-and-left until back to place and partners, thirty two steps for the entire figure.

FIGURE II: Join R. hands with partners only. The head couples (both couples in line 1 and the opposite couples in line 3), advance toward each other with four walking steps. Walk backward to place (4 steps). Walk once again forward and release hold (4 steps), pass opposite dancers with right shoulders and while passing shout "Grebienkoy" (comb through) (4 steps), advance to opposite position (two steps), then change places with own partner (2 steps). All of the above in 8 measures — 16 steps.

The girls of these two head couples move up to the center of the set with four steps (leaving room between each other). With four steps the boys move up to the girls who are standing still. Boys walk with two steps in front of their own partners to the girls' right side. During the next two steps in front of their own partners to the girls' right side. During the next two steps face partners and take the regular social dance position. With four pivot steps all return to their own places (pivot turn — feet between feet, boy steps on L foot and turns with R foot of the floor, the girl does the same thing but with the opposite foot; step on next foot and pivot, etc.). 8 measures for this section.

FIGURE III. (Study this figure carefully.)

Only both head couples and the opposite girls (Nos. 3), will be active in this figure.

The two boys in line No. 1, place their right hands around their partners' waists. Girls No. 1 place their left hands on their partners inside shoulders. Stand inside shoulders adjacent and join free hands holding them low. In this position the head couples of line No. 1 walk forward with four steps, then walk backward with four, and forward once again with four steps (6 Meas. in all).

During the next two measures the boys release their present hold and with their right hands join (at palms) their partners inside (left) hand, stretching it, and with four steps both turn counter-clockwise, the boy pivoting in place, the girl with long strides walk-

ing completely around. At the same time, the opposite girls (Nos. 3) move up with four steps to their opposing couples who by their fourth step are facing the opposite girl and stand in an arch formation.

The opposite girls go under the arch of each couples No. 1 and each girl walks away from the center of circle, around and meets in front of the two couples who were arches. Both girls join inside hands (as they face the two couples) and form an arch. At the same time, the couples who acted as an arch for the girls, do as follows: each boy changes place with his girl by her turning in front of him and under their joined arms (2 steps). The above is done by all in four steps.

Both boys lead their girls under the arch formed by the opposite girls (4 steps) then the couples No. 1 turn about and form arches. Both girls who were the arch release their hold, turn about and each one goes under her facing arch and back to place (4 steps). Take regular social dance position; head couples pivot back to their home places, while the two single girls pivot with their partners in place. The entire figures III is done to 16 measures (32 steps).

Couples No. 3 perform as the leads in repeating the entire Fig. III.

FIGURE IV.

All 8 men advance to the center and extend right hands to form a star, raising hands high. Walk around completely in 16 steps back to place. Now the girls walk through a right hand star. All inactive dancers merely stand in position.

Repeat Figure I.

Repeat Figure II. However, side couples (2 and 4) perform the figure.

Repeat Figure III. However, lines No. 3 and 4 will be active.

FIGURE V: Join right hands with partner and walk to center with four steps. When in center, men form a left hand star and walk counter-clockwise until the end of the 16th measure. Turn to face a clockwise direction and release hold. Girls form a right hand star. Girls place their left hands in the crook of the partners' elbow (hands of men are on hips). Walk clockwise for 16 measures and back to place.

FIGURE VI: This figure is a form of promenade "Obkhod Po Krugu" (The walk in circle). All facing in a counter-clockwise direction the boys remain on the inside of the circle with their partners on their right. With four steps the boys walk up to the girl ahead, holding her in dance position as described in Fig. III, and swings her around with four walking steps, he himself turning backward with the girl turning forward, one complete turn of four steps and finishes in a counter-clockwise direction. Release hold and with four more steps, the boy walks up to the next girl (girls mark time in place), and swings her around in the same manner. Continue this figure until back to original partner. Finish dance with a bow and a curtsy to each other.